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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 1, 2009

In Today's Papers

Obama Will Meet Opposition Party Leaders in Ankara
Media outlets report U.S. President Barack Obama, who is expected to arrive in Ankara on April 5, will hold a meeting with opposition leaders in the Turkish parliament. Obama will pay a visit to Ataturk's Mausoleum (Anitkabir) in the morning on April 6, and will later deliver a speech at the Turkish Parliament. Turkish sources said Obama wanted to hold talks with the leaders of opposition parties, according to papers. CHP and DTP agreed to meet President Obama during his time in Ankara. MHP said their party leader Devlet Bahceli is reluctant to meet with Obama together with other party leaders, but will join a one-on-one meeting with the U.S. President. Parliament Speaker Koksal Toptan said Obama would meet with each of the three opposition party leaders briefly at his office in the parliament. Obama will also have a 15-minute meeting with Toptan before addressing the lawmakers for 45 minutes.

Editorial Commentary on President Obama's Upcoming Visit to Turkey

Murat Yetkin wrote in liberal-intellectual Radikal: "Even though President Obama's Turkey visit coincided with the Alliance of Civilizations meeting, co-chaired by Spain and Turkey, President Obama's main focus of his visit is U.S.-Turkey relations. Protocol officials have worked out a concession with the attendance of President Obama to the Alliance of Civilization reception and the dinner in order not to disappoint the Turkish and the Spanish leaders. In other words, President Obama be present at the event but will not be part of meetings. As Ambassador Jeffrey stated on March 12, President Obama is coming here because he wants to visit Turkey and because he believes in the importance of Turkey."

March 29 Elections: The Aftermath

Mainstream Milliyet points to the changes in the preferences of voters: The AKP entered the political arena in 2002 by winning 34 percent of the vote. In 2007 parliamentary elections, support for the party soared to 47 percent. The AKP, however, lost the support of 815,000 voters in the March 29 municipal elections. Liberal Radikal notes support for the AKP dropped by 17 percent whereas support for the Felicity Party (SP,) CHP and MHP rose in Sunday's

elections. Mainstream Vatan says the "rule" never changes -- support for governments declines when economic growth slows down, as it had been the case when Turkey's gross domestic product shrank by 6.2 percent in the fourth quarter of 2008, according to Turkish Statistics Institute (TUIK) data released Tuesday.

Mainstream Hurriyet reports the main opposition CHP leader Deniz Baykal said, "Turkish politics will not be the same anymore." Baykal stressed the AKP government "had to admit there is a decline in its power." Furthermore, Baykal said, "The period of trying to control of the judiciary and to silence the media is over. The period of manipulating the economy for different goals has ended."

Baykal said that there was 7.5-point increase in public support for his party, and added the CHP would fulfill its responsibilities to respond to the rising public support. On the CHP's poor performances in the mainly Kurdish east and southeast areas, Baykal said a "detailed analysis" would be conducted in order to increase the visibility of the party in the Kurdish areas.

Cicek 'Worried' over the DTP Success in Elections
Media outlets report government spokesman Cemil Cicek's "worries" over the picture that has emerged after the municipal elections. Mainstream Hurriyet reports Cicek said, "In certain regions of the country, there is no party other than the pro-Kurdish DTP. The DTP has won Igdır, which is on the border with Armenia. The AKP only won Mardin in that region. One needs to take a careful look to that region." Leftist Taraf says Cicek made "poisonous" comments regarding the victory of the DTP in Igdır, saying "They have reached the Armenia border, and the situation should be examined in light of

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Turkish security," which Taraf calls an "ultra-nationalist approach within the AKP" to the Kurdish issue.

Editorial Commentary on March 29 Elections Aftermath

Ali Bayramoglu wrote in Islamist oriented Yeni Safak: "The ruling AKP should carefully examine the election's outcome and act accordingly. Given the results, the AKP will enjoy a jump in popular support if it pursues liberal and democratic rhetoric, and if it makes the EU reforms a priority."

Fikret Bila wrote in mainstream Milliyet: "The military seems to have taken a lesson from the last general elections in 2007. When the military tried to use its influence over politics against the AKP, it actually worked for them to gain for more popular support. This time, under General Basbug's leadership the military stood away from politics and deliberately refrained from making any comments besides on issues related to security and terrorism. As proven by the March 29 local elections, internal dynamics of democracy with free will of people is the best remedy for problem solving."

Turkey-Israel to Hold Joint Naval Exercises in Summer (Cumhuriyet)
Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet reports Turkey and Israel will hold joint naval exercises in the summer. On Monday, Turkish and Israeli Foreign Ministry undersecretaries Ertugrul Apakan and Yossi Gal held a meeting in Ankara for the first time since the "Davos crisis" between PM Erdogan and Israel's Shimon Peres to discuss ways for repairing the strains in bilateral ties, says Cumhuriyet.

TUBITAK Sacks Editors in Controversial Move
Mainstream Hurriyet reports the Turkish science and technological research institution TUBITAK's board fired six editors of the Science and Technology journal, who have played a key role in transforming the journal into an internationally renowned science magazine. Hurriyet says the editors who were fired discovered the personnel "changes" made by the board when they checked the website of the magazine they were editing. TUBITAK came under the spotlight last month when its board removed articles about Charles Darwin and the theory of evolution from the Science and Technology magazine's March issue, causing heated controversy.

Turkish Economy Contracts 6.2 Percent in Last Quarter of 2008
Media outlets report the Turkish economy contracted by 6.2 percent in the last quarter of 2008, according to data released Tuesday by

the Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK). Business daily Referans sees the shrink as "a warning for the government." The paper says that "after Taiwan, Turkey demonstrated the second worst growth performance in the global economic downturn." Analysts predict this is going to be the first of negative figures, the first quarter will be worse, perhaps more than 9 percent, and Turkey's poor performance will prevail through the third quarter. The global crisis has sparked the first economic contraction since the AKP came to office in 2002, driving the jobless rate to the highest in four years and fueling calls for the governing party to agree on a new deal with the IMF, comment papers.

Sabah Correspondent Reports from Guantanamo

Mainstream Sabah's correspondent visited the US detention facility in Guantanamo and reported, "Since 2002, more than 700 prisoners, including ten Turks, were kept in Guantanamo prison in Cuba. There are no Turkish prisoners there now and total number of prisoners are 1240. Three thousand US troops protect the base and the prisoners. In order to remain anonymous, the guardians address each other with the nick names. If there are any prisoners who decide to go on hunger strike, they are forced fed through nose catheters. Prisoners are kept in three different camps in the base: Camp Delta, Camp 5 and Camp 6. Our first stop was Camp Delta. Only the well behaved prisoners were kept here, and the rest were sent to Camp 5 and 6. According to the base data 65 percent of the prisoners are distributed between these two camps." The series of reporting from

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Guantanamo will continue tomorrow.

US and Iranian Reps Meet at Afghanistan Summit at The Hague

Mainstream Hurriyet reports that US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton stressed at the Afghanistan Summit in The Hague that US Special Envoy for Afghanistan Richard Holbrooke had a short and sincere meeting with Iranian Deputy FM Muhammed Mehdi Ahundzade. Clinton added that the meeting was not pre-scheduled and the two reps did not speak on any specific issue but just agreed not to interrupt ongoing contacts.

TV News (CNN Turk)

Domestic

- On Thursday, Prime Minister Erdogan will join the G-20 meeting in London.
- Prime Minister Erdogan is expected to reshuffle his cabinet after President Obama's visit to Turkey next week.
- At least 30 leading Spanish companies will come to Turkey in June or July to discuss possibilities for cooperation.

World

- A CSIS report on Turkey advises the Obama administration to strengthen dialogue with Turkey.
- President Abdullah Gul said Turkish troops would have left Cyprus by now had the Greek Cypriots approved the 2004 UN-backed Annan Plan for the reunification of the island.
- Iraq has started flying drones along its borders to stop foreign fighters and arms infiltrating through neighboring countries.

JEFFREY